

OBSERVATIONS

UPON

Church-Affairs,

Addressed to

Principal *SMITH*



EDINBURGH.
Printed in the Year M. DCC. XXXIV

OF SERVATIONS

UPON

Church History

Addressed to

Practical & Moral

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Printed in the Year 1800



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Church-Affairs,

Addressed to

Principal *SMITH*.

S I R,



Apply myself to you in particular, not only as you are justly accounted a principal Leader on one Side in the Disputes that are now amongst us, but as esteeming you a Man open to Argument, and who ought not to be ashamed to rectify any Mistake you may have honestly fallen into, nor neglect any Thing in your Power to procure a just Peace among the Ministers and Christians of this Church. Your publick Character makes your Name known to all, especially on this Occasion, that you have so signally distinguished yourself; and my prefixing it to this Address can give you no Trouble which is unreasonable, or which the Nature of the Case would not require you to take otherwise. If you can either make a just and full Vindication of your Conduct, or can prevent the evil Consequences of it, in Case you shall be satisfied it has been improper,

I presume you will not take it ill of any one to give you the Opportunity.

The Particulars I propose to take under Consideration are these; 1. I would consider the Case of the four deprived Ministers, draw a Comparison betwixt their Guilt and that of some others of our Ministers, who of late have appeared as Authors, that you may take this Occasion to reflect on the Impartiality of your Conduct. 2. Offer some Considerations on the Method of planting vacant Congregations that has of late obtained, and of which you are so strenuous a Defender. 3. Make some Remarks on the *Narrative and State of the Proceedings of the Judicatories against Masters Erskine, Wilson, &c.*

You know, Sir, the Occasion which gave Rise to the Guilt of the deprived Ministers was this; The Assembly for the Year 1732, under their own and the Influence of other wise Men, passed the fam'd Act now in Being for planting vacant Congregations. It is not my present Business to give a Detail of the hard Things supposed to be contained in it, nor to say, That by this Act Ministers may be settled, tho' there be not Half a Dozen of the whole Congregation agreeing to it, Instances of which have already taken Place; and that all which is hereby left the People, to whose Inclinations, according to the *Claim of Right*, we owe our Establishment, is to object or libel. Grateful Return! Nor shall I mention, that the Act being designed to take Place only in these Cases where the Patron does not exercise his Right, it must infer an Obligation on your Courts to settle upon a Presentation from a Patron, because in that Case you have no other Rule. Thus, Sir, the Act has been constructed in your Judicatories; and, according to this Construction, that *righteous* Court, the Commission of the Kirk, has actually determined it; And I might submit it to your Judgment, if this is not an Invitation to all Patrons to use the unjust Power the Law has put into their Hands; but it is sufficient to have dropt the Hint, and these Things shall be past in Silence: Only I beg Leave to observe, That, according to this Act, *Jacobites* and *Episcopalians* have, by a Deed of the Church, the Power put into their Hands of planting perhaps more than one Half of our Parishes. When I say *Jacobites*, &c. I mean Persons who, were it to be determined by them whether his Majesty King George or a *Popish Pretender* should fill the Throne of Great Bri-

tain, would with one Voice give it to the latter ; and who, if invested with the Power of deciding whether Episcopacy or Presbytery should be the Church-establishment, would unanimously speak for the former.

To me, Sir, it seems somewhat new and surprising (owing perhaps to my Unacquaintance with History) for a Society *voluntarily* to give away the Right of electing such as are to minister to them in their most important Concerns ; voluntarily, I say, to give away this Right to those who do not belong to the Society, nay, to its avowed Enemies.

I have heard it indeed alledged, That in the present Case there could no bad Consequences follow, because the Power given to such Gentlemen extended only to their electing Persons licensed by the Authority of your own Church, upon their giving the most solemn Declarations of their Adherence to your happy Constitution, and after signing their Belief of the Divine Right of Presbytery.

But, notwithstanding of this, it must be allowed, that amongst your Clergy some are more more firmly attach'd to the Presbyterian Interest than others, and all are not equally capable of defending it ; yet such Persons (I mean these whose Attachment is least, or whose Abilities are smallest) will certainly be most encouraged by Gentlemen of the Episcopal Perswasion, if they act consistently with themselves : And one should be apt to imagine, that these to whom the Care and Preservation of the Church is committed, ought to be so far from putting it in the Power of any to harm her in the smallest Matter, that they should carefully guard against it. But, how much stronger does the Argument become, if I be allowed to suppose, that even such as are clothed with the sacred Office of the Ministry may act a deceitful Part ? Methinks it will be no great Breach of Christian Charity to say, Many of them have given too good Reason to believe that it is more than probable.

Why then, Sir, may not the secret Lovers of Episcopacy openly take on the Vows of Presbytery, when they know that the Gentlemen of their own Sect have a Power to promote them to the Office of the Ministry, and in Return give such Gentlemen the strongest Assurance of their Readiness to serve the common Interest so soon as an Opportunity offers ?

Thus by your Act it may happen, that one Half of our Churches shall be planted, not only by Persons who are
avow-

avowed Enemies to our Constitution, but by such as heartily join in wishing her total Overthrow ; and sure their best Endeavours will not be wanting upon proper Occasions : This I say, Sir, is possible ; Would to God it amounted to nothing more ! And tho' no Society can prevent or sufficiently guard against all Things which may tend to its Prejudice, yet I would willingly know if they are under an Obligation *voluntarily* to increase its possible Mischiefs, or if they act a wise Part, when of themselves they multiply the Chances for its Ruin. You, Sir, will be able easily to resolve these Questions, and hence to judge with what Wisdom and Caution the Assembly's Act has been framed : Therefore I shall only add, That it might have been expected that yourself, and some others of the Reverend Compilers of this Act, who, under Pretence of a more than ordinary Regard to the Civil Authority and his Majesty's Interest, so strenuously promote Settlements by Presentations; it might have been expected that your Zeal would have been a little more uniform than to appear the first who endowed his Majesty's avowed Enemies with a Power of planting vacant Congregations. But, to pass from this Digression,

You know Sir, Mr. *Erskine*, in a Sermon at the Opening of the Synod at *Perth*, thought it necessary to bear his Testimony publickly to what he reckoned Truth, by declaring against the iniquous Things he imagined to be contained in this Act. He used indeed Expressions upon this and other Heads, which I think few sober-minded Men will undertake to vindicate : His Brethren so far resented the Freedoms he took, that they judged him censurable for treating the Deeds and Acts of the Assembly in such a Manner : Judging himself lesed by their Sentence, he appeals to the Assembly for the Year 1733, by whom the Sentence of the Synod was affirmed, and Mr. *Erskine* rebuked : Here again he strikes out, gives in a Protest, which Protest the Assembly in their consummate Prudence receive, and appoint their Commission in *August* to suspend him and his Adherents, provided they did not withdraw their Protest, and express their Sorrow for what they had done : The Time for the Meeting of the dreaded Commission comes on ; the Protesters give in, in Writing, a long Detail of their Principles, and, amidst a great Variety of other Things, say, That by their Protest they mean

a solemn Declaration of their Principles: The Commission judging nothing in their Papers satisfactory, suspend them till their next Meeting, according to the Appointment of the Assembly: They break through the Act of Suspension, and continue to preach in their several Churches: The Commission meets again in November, and proceeds still according to the Appointment of the Assembly to a higher Censure, declaring them no longer Ministers of this Church, and discharging the Ministers of it to maintain any Ministerial Communion with them. From this short View of their Story every one will observe, that the Guilt for which they are now excluded your Church, and for which all other Ministers are henceforth not to consider them as their Brethren and Fellow-labourers, is their refusing to withdraw their Protest, and express their Sorrow for having taken such a Step. To make an impartial Enquiry into the Justice and Equity of this Sentence, it will, I apprehend, be necessary to lay open the Nature of the Ministerial Office, and the Manner of its Conveyance from Jesus, the wise Author of the Institution; and when this is understood, the Nature and Reason of the Thing will then be a Guide to our Understandings, in judging whether the Guilt of your Brethren bears any Proportion to the Punishment they suffer.

You'll certainly agree with me, when I say, That tho' Jesus Christ himself did institute and appoint an Order of Men to preach his Gospel to Mankind, and tho' he authorized his Apostles to intrust others, in the Way presently to be explained, with the same Office; yet he neither left it to them, nor any of their Successors, to appoint the Qualifications, and prescribe the Duties of those that should be vested with the Ministerial Character: This he hath done himself, while he gave to his Church *some Apostles*, &c. * Ministers indeed are to judge whether such as offer themselves to the Ministry are possess of the Qualifications appointed by Christ; and, without their declaring them to be so, none are orderly and regularly ordained: But, when any Person is once declared, by these already in Office, to be possess of those Qualifications required by Christ, and, in Consequence of this, offers and devotes himself to the Ministry, and is set apart to it by Fasting, Prayer, and Imposition of Hands, he becomes

* *Eph.* i. 11. *1 Tim.* iii. 2, &c. *Tit.* i. 6, 7, &c.

comes clothed with the Office, that is, he comes to have Power and Authority immediately from Christ himself to discharge the Office, or he is authorized and obliged by Christ to all the Parts of the Ministerial Function; or he derives that Authority and Obligation from the Charter of Christ, the Ordinances being only the Instruments of Conveyance.

To illustrate this, allow me use a Quotation from a very judicious Divine; "The Mayor, says he, upon his Election is by the Charter authorized and obliged to the Government of a Town corporate; but he is not for Order's Sake to exercise his Authority without a publick Installation by such Officers as the Charter appoints, nor is the Corporation till then obliged to receive and obey him as such; but still his Power and Authority is derived from the Charter, not from those who instal or invest him: So here, adds my Author, the same Charter of Christ, that obliges such a Person to be one of his Ministers, does also oblige him for Order's Sake to enter by this solemn Rite upon the actual Exercise of it wherever he can have such Ministerial Ordination and Investiture; and till then the Church is not obliged to pay him the Respect due to his Character: But still his Authority is derived from the Charter, not from his Ordainers; and none but Christ himself can really authorize and oblige him to the Ministerial Office; and for any others to pretend to do it, is but to usurp his Sovereign Authority as the Head of his Church, and the Fountain of all Power exercised by all that minister in it. 'Tis the like Presumption as a Recorder would be guilty of, if he should pretend the Power of the Mayor is derived from him; or that the Lord Chancellor would be guilty of, if he pretended that all these derive their Power from him, whose Patent he seals."

This Account of Ministerial Ordination and Investiture my Author further confirms, by Quotations from Mr. Olliffe a Divine of the Church of England, from Amesius de Consc. and from Wolleb.

The Use I'm to make of what has been said is this; If the above Representation of Things be just, it must be owned, that the deprived Ministers were and still are Persons authorized and obliged by Christ to all the Parts of the Ministerial Function; Could then their refusing to withdraw a Protest against a Sentence of the Church, censuring them neither for Heterodoxy nor Immorality, be a just

sufficient Ground for disabling them to execute an Office to which they were authorized and obliged by Christ? Or in Reality, can any Thing be Foundation enough to support such a Sentence but the Want of these Qualifications required by Christ, if, as was observed, he alone has Power to appoint what Qualifications are requisite and necessary in his Servants?

Put, Sir, the worst Construction upon their Protest possibly you can: And tho' they themselves have said, nothing more is intended than a solemn Declaration of their Principles, do you imagine that hereby they have condemn'd and refused Submission to the Determination of their Judges in the last Resort; Yet still it may be worthy your Consideration, whether there be not the greatest Danger in screwing up Church-authority, when it has no Part of Divine Revelation for its Object to that enormous Size, that Men must either resolve to sink under the Load, or be expell'd a Christian Society? Would not this clothe Churchmen with a Power to appoint, I don't say Qualifications, but unreasonable Terms of Ministerial Communion, which sure shall never be countenanced by the merciful Jesus?

It must be owned by all, that the Act of Assembly 1732 is a mere human Act, destitute of Divine Authority: If the Church then makes One's Refusing to withdraw a Protest against a Censure inflicted for impugning this Act, a Reason of turning him out of her Communion, she becomes at least equally severe in punishing the Despiser of this late Part of her Constitution, as the Transgressor of the undoubted Laws of Christ. Is this to proportion the Punishment to the Offence? Does she thus observe that Justice and Equity in inflicting Censures enjoined by the righteous Judge of all the Earth? And what if we shall see her Repentments keenest where the Crime is least? This has obtain'd at *Rome*, and shall we be so unhappy as to share in the like Misery?

But, to return, you'll allow that my Charity does not exceed just Bounds, when I profess to believe that the deprived Ministers are Persons who have sincerely devoted themselves to the Ministry: And of one of them in particular I must observe, that he was born to a pretty plentiful Fortune so as to be far from needing the Contribution of Friends, or charitable Fund towards his Education; for this Reason nothing but a sincere and fervent Affection to

Christ and his Interest among Men could probably have determined him to this Choice, since 50 *L. per annum* could have been no great Bait to one of his Fortune ; and you yourself know some now in the Ministry, who would never have thought on that Way of Life, had they been born to the Half of his Incomes.

- If then in the Construction of Charity the deprived Ministers must be regarded as Men who have sincerely devoted themselves to serve the Interests of Mankind, by publishing the Gospel of Heaven ; and if one of them in particular has given stronger Proofs of his Sincerity this Way than many of your Brethren ; then it may be said, That their refusing to withdraw a Protest even against the Sentence of the supreme Court, which has no Part of Divine Revelation for its Object, cannot be such Reason for turning them out of the Church as its wise Author will approve of ? I freely own, I have been long in Use to think, that if Jesus Christ be the alone King, and Head, and Law-giver of his Church, it must unavoidably follow, that no Member of that Society can be cut off, agreeably to his Will, except for the sole Cause of transgressing his Laws ; and hence to divest Men of an Office which they have from Christ, in Consequence of their protesting against Censures inflicted for the Transgression of mere Church-Laws, appears to me a real Usurpation of the incommunicable Right of Christ to be the only Lord and Law-giver to his Church : And you know, Sir, this is what you attempted, when you gave it for your Judgment that they ought to be deposed. The Case to me is evident to a Demonstration.

The same View of the Relation in which Jesus stands to his People and Church, will evince the second Part of the Commission's Sentence, which inhibits all the Ministers of this Church to maintain Ministerial Communion with the deprived Ministers, to be no less iniquous : And, were I here to enter upon a particular Consideration of this Point, many Things might come into Account ; but I shall only observe, That it will be allowed to be Christ's express Appointment, that his Ministers and People should live in the strictest Communion together. When therefore any Church inhibites her Members to maintain Ministerial and Christian Communion with such as cannot be charged with either renouncing the Doctrines or transgressing the Laws of Christ, she not only makes to her-
self

self other Limits of Communion than Christ has fixed, and hedges herself up within these Limits, but is guilty of the most hainous Iniquity, by injoining Men to live in a direct Contradiction to that Law of Love and Friendship. The Scriptures speak with a good deal of Severity against removing the Land-marks of Men; What then shall we say of changing these which the supreme Lawgiver has established? The Sin is still the greater in the present Case, when the Men, from whom all must separate, are Persons of unblemished Lives, and cast out of the Communion of the Church for Trifles; while others, who live in open Hostility to the known Laws of Christ, and are not so much as visible Christians (visible Subjection and visible Rebellion being Opposites) are entertained and cajoll'd in it. It is this that makes the Church lose the Savour of the great Things of the Gospel, and transforms her from a spiritual Society, inviven'd, acted and governed by the Spirit of Christ, into a mere carnal Thing like the rest of the World. But I must stop short on this Subject, lest I be called upon to give over *Whim* and *Cant*, and speak intelligibly.

I now pass on to draw a Comparison betwixt their Guilt, and that of some other of our Ministers who have of late appeared under the Character of Authors, that you may take this Occasion to reflect on the Impartiality of your Conduct. I shall instance only in two;

And I begin with the Reply which the Minister of *Moffat* (now in *Edinburgh*) thought proper to give to a Letter directed to him, concerning the positive Institutions of Christianity: You know, the Occasion which gave Rise to this Debate was, Your Reverend and Ingenuous Fellow-presbyter published a Sermon he had preached before the Synod of *Drumfries*, intituled, *The Regard due to Revelation, and to Pretences to it, considered; with a Preface, containing Remarks on Christianity as old as the Creation*. In this Sermon he endeavours to show, against the Deists, " That Reason is not (as he phrases it) such a sufficient Faculty, as that it can yield a full Instruction in Matters of Religion, and concerning a future State: See " p. 9, 10, 11. For supposing (*says he*) that Reason is " able to instruct us in all other Things, still it leaves us " at a Loss in this one, which is of the greatest Moment " and in which we stand in Need of the greatest Certainty, to wit, How God will deal with Sinners, or

" as in many Instances have acted a vitious and unreason-
 " nable Part: What must be done in the Case of Guilt,
 " is a Question at the same Time of the greatest Import-
 " tance, yet not to be determined by Reason ; for here
 " Reason is at a Stand, *p.* 11. and therefore, whatever
 " Conjectures we may form about it, we can never by our
 " Reasoning attain to any Certainty in the Case. A De-
 " ist may fancy to himself, that a Being of so much
 " Goodness, &c. will not be rigorous, &c. but it is evi-
 " dent, to speak the most favourably of this Scheme, it is
 " nothing but Conjecture, and we may form Conjectures
 " on the other Side: In short, the Man who thinks he
 " can determine by his Reasoning, how God will deal
 " with the Guilty, and fancies it needless there should be
 " any Revelation about it, acts much like a Rebel, who
 " is for finding out by Reason, how his Prince is to deal
 " with him."

In Answer to all this, the Letter-writer, *p.* 18. endeavours, among other Things, to prove,

1st. " That what your Reverend Brother Mr. *Wallace*
 " calls a Conjecture, is really, and in a strict Account, a
 " Demonstration, if the Use of that Name may be admit-
 " ted in Morality ; and that we need no other Assurance,
 " nor can receive any greater, than what Reason affords,
 " &c."

2^{dly}, " That the Perswasion of the Pardon of Sin upon
 " Repentance, which is attainable by the Use of Reason,
 " is equally certain with that of the Divine Goodness ;
 " that, if the one be conjectural, so is the other."

3^{dly}, " And consequently, that the Belief of any Reve-
 " lation whatsoever cannot possibly contain a greater Degree
 " of Certainty."

Now, instead of entring into the Reasoning of this Wri-
 ter on these Subjects, which would be foreign to my Design,
 I chuse rather to consider the Effect of it upon your Reve-
 rend Brother. You'll observe then, that, *p.* 43, 44, 45, &c.
 of his Reply to the Author of the Letter, he confesses,
 " That, if we have no Revelation, it is the most natural
 " Conclusion, that God will pardon such as truly repent :
 " Hence he adds, If any Thing I had said were contrary
 " to this, I would fairly retract it. " And most certainly,
 what he said in his Sermon, is contrary to this : Hence he
 acknowledges, " That there is indeed one Passage in which

" I have not exprest myself so accurately as I should have
 " done; For, *says he*, when I assert, That it is but a
 " Conjecture that God will pardon on Repentance, and
 " that we may form Conjectures on the other Side, I
 " ought to have distinguished betwixt what God will do
 " immediately upon our Repentance, and what he may be
 " supposed to do afterwards: For indeed, *adds he*, it ap-
 " pears to me to be a very natural Conclusion, That, if we
 " repent and reform, God will pardon at last; But I can-
 " not see a greater Probability, that he will do this imme-
 " diately upon our Repentance, or immediately after
 " Death: I think we are absolutely uncertain as to the
 " Time;—and therefore, as this of Necessity must make
 " us anxious, so there is a Necessity of a Revelation to
 " free us from this Anxiety (to wit, the Anxiety that must
 " arise from the supposed Uncertainty as to the Time) and
 " to declare the Counsels of Heaven concerning the Guil-
 " ty."

To bring all this Home to the Design in Hand, here is a
 Reverend Brother of yours, who openly publishes to the
 World, that a Divine Revelation is necessary, not to tell us
 that God will pardon the Penitent, for this (*says he*) is a very
 natural Conclusion from the Light of Nature and Reason;
 but Divine Revelation is necessary to fix and settle this Cir-
 cumstance, *viz.* the Time when God will pardon the Pe-
 nitent; and to free us from the Anxiety that must arise
 from the Uncertainty that Reason leaves us in as to this
 Point: We have no Need of Revelation for the first, but on-
 ly for the last.

If this Doctrine, in Connection with the other Things
 necessarily involved and implied in it, stand not, in a di-
 ametrical Opposition to that Plan of Divinity contain-
 ed in the Scriptures, and laid down in your publick Stan-
 dards, nay, if it be not giving up all that any Deist needs
 ask; Words are in vain, and we can be sure of nothing:
 And yet, Sir, you concurred in a Call from the City of
Edinburgh to this Reverend Brother; and, if I mistake not,
 you live daily in Ministerial and Christian Communion
 with him. You were not only for depriving and turning
 out of the Church, but even for deposing from the Mini-
 sterial Office, Men, blameless in their Lives, useful in
 their Congregations, stanch in their Adherence to your
 publick Standards; while you cherefully received as your
 Fellow-presbyter and Fellow-labourer, one who had open-
 ly

ly proclaimed to the World, that we want not a Divine Revelation to tell us, That God will pardon the Penitent, for this, says he, is a very natural Conclusion ; but only to fix the Time when the Pardon will be granted. And hence the Necessity of Revelation is gloriously evinced.

After what I have represented from this Author, whom, by the Way, I regard as an ingenuous and candid Writer, you will not be surprized to find him, p. 5 of his Reply, saying, *I cannot see the Necessity of supposing the Inspiration of the sacred Writings, in order to establish the Christian Scheme against the Deists.* — One of your Penetration must see, that this and other Nostrums of this Author are directly contrary to the Doctrine of the New Testament, when taken even in a greater Latitude than your publick Standards will allow.

The other Reverend Author I mention to you is, Mr. Archibald Campbell S. T. P. *Regius* Professor of Church-history at St. Andrews ; you will be able to judge, if what he advances has a favourable Aspect on genuine Christianity, when once I have put you in Mind, that, in his *Enquiry into the Origine of moral Virtue*, he would persuade the World, that reasonable Creatures neither should nor possibly can elicit one Act of Religion or Virtue from any higher Origine or Principle than Love to themselves, or for any higher End than to promote their own Self-interest.

Certainly this, which he so warmly contends for through the whole of that Book, is by no Means consistent with the Doctrine of your Standards, which you Ministers so solemnly declare to be founded on Divine Revelation, particularly *Confession of Faith*, Chap. 16. Sect. 2, 7.

The same Gentleman has newly revived and adopted a *Socinian* Tenet, in that he denies that the Light of natural Reason, without Revelation, discovers the Existence of God, or any of his Divine Attributes ; consequently denies, that there is any such Thing at all among Men, but what one Way or other proceeds from supernatural Revelation. This is the Scope of his Latine Oration, *De vanitate luminis naturæ*.

You know, Sir, the Use the *Socinians* make of this Hypothesis, and how they gloss the Scriptures usually adduced to prove natural Religion : What Agreement there is between the Professor and them in this Matter, I leave you to judge, by comparing *Socinus* his *Preflections*, Cap. 2. and
Ostorodius

Ostorodius his Institut. Cap. 1. with the Preface to the second Edition of Mr C——'s *Enquiry*, where he says, "The very Truths and Principles of Natural Religion, at least these upon which it is founded, and without which it cannot possibly subsist, that are to be found in Heathen Philosophers, are not the Discoveries of human Reason, but were all along handed down from one Generation to another, and come originally from supernatural Revelation: And in this Opinion (*adds he*) I have the Pleasure to be assured I go along with the Apostle Paul, when he declares, * That that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shewed, or did plainly reveal it to them, in teaching them expressly; as One may likewise judge from *Heb. xi. 3.* that themselves, and all other Things, are his Workmanship." It cannot escape your Observation, that Professor Campbell has hereby renounced the very first Sentence and Proposition of our Confession of Faith, viz. *That the Light of Nature, and the Works of Creation and Providence, do so far manifest the Goodness, Wisdom and Power of God, as to leave Men inexcusable, &c.*

It is indeed mysterious what can be in the Matter, that, tho' the Professor denies natural Religion in the Sense it is ordinarily taken, yet he continues to speak frequently of natural Religion as a Thing distinct from revealed, and is so fond of that natural Religion, that he seriously recommends it, and the Study of Heathen Philosophers, to young Divines, who have Views towards the holy Ministry; and he tells them, "That they will thereby, through the Blessing of God, avoid Superstition on the one Hand, and Infidelity on the other, and become real Blessings to Mankind, without Regard to Sect or Party, Pref. to 2d Edit. of *Enq.* p. 22, 23." And, in the Preface to his Discourse, *Proving that the Apostles were no Enthusiasts*, p. 6. he says, 'The Laws of Nature do ly obvious to the Observation of every Man that enquires with Attention into the Nature of Things, and in themselves are a certain and sufficient Rule to direct rational Minds to Happiness; and that our observing these Laws is the Means or Instrument of our real and lasting Felicity.' Should the Professor be able to reconcile this with his other Opinion already narrated, yet, sure I am, it is of no less

* *Rom. i. 19. 20.*

less dangerous Tendency to the Cause of Christianity : For, if once it be allowed, that the Laws of Nature ly obvious to the Observation of every Man who enquires with Attention into the Nature of Things, and that these Laws are in themselves a certain and sufficient Rule to direct rational Minds to Happiness, I am afraid some will be apt to infer, that there is no great Necessity of the Christian Revelation ; And I appeal to you, if your Standards do not teach a greater Necessity of Christianity than is just and well-grounded, were these Principles true.

Thus, Sir, I have put an Opportunity into your Hands of reflecting upon the Impartiality of your Church's Conduct, by comparing at your Leisure the Tenets of these Reverend Writers, with the real or supposed Guilt of the deprived Ministers ; and I hope you will take into Consideration, not only the Severity with which the latter have been treated, but the extraordinary Good-liking which has been shown to the former, and the conspicuous Stations to which they have been lately advanced, as a Reward of their bad Attempts to new-model your Doctrine. And, as the Press hath a happier Influence than the Pulpit to spread these wise Discoveries, let not even this escape your Notice ; begging Pardon for using so much Freedom, I take Leave of this Part of my Subject.

I go on to offer some Considerations on the Method of planting vacant Congregations, which of late has obtained amongst us, and of which you are so strenuous a Defender.

The Nation, Sir, is by this Time very sensible, that, in planting vacant Churches, the People are now intirely neglected and disregarded. I am not here to enter into any Disquisition about the Interest the People ought to have in the Election of their spiritual Guides, but shall consider the Matter merely in a political View, and with Regard to the Support of our Interest as Presbyterians, or as a separate Body of Men ; and must frankly confess, I can imagine nothing more imprudent, in the present Circumstances at least, than such a total Neglect and Disregard of the Populace in the Election of Ministers, as is now in Use.

It is certain, that plain People of low Education and vulgar Taste, who are Strangers to the Refinements of Learning and Politeness, do constitute at least nineteen Parts in twenty of most of our Congregations, and are generally

ally the Supports of the Congregations they belong to by their Attendance. Now, to speak plainly, I apprehend it is chiefly those that make you Presbyterian Ministers considerable to many who have no Regard at all to your religious Principles; for, to the Bulk of Mankind, there is something in the very Idea of a large Place, and a crowded Audience, which strikes the Thought, and secures a Society from that Contempt which might fall upon it, if they appeared but as an Handful of Men. As this is the Case, as Numbers make our Interest considerable, and as these Numbers are principally to be found among the common People; I know nothing more destructive to our Interest as Presbyterians, than a Neglect, a Contempt of the People in the Particular under Consideration: Such a Contempt and Neglect of them must necessarily be attended with the Loss of your Interest in them; And, when this is gone, I would fain know what must become either of you or them. As for them, I imagine the most Part will grow indifferent to all Religion (as too many of them are already) and seldom appear in any Place of Divine Worship; and others, of a warmer and more resolute Temper, will find out Ways to make Ministers uneasy. If they can get rid of you no other Way, they will draw off to Neighbouring Congregations, or form new Societies, and chuse Ministers agreeable to their own Taste, who may probably think it their Interest and Prudence to maintain and inflame their Resentments: And thus our common Interest as Presbyterians must moulder and crumble away by our frequent Divisions and Animosities; and you Ministers, who, by your Contempt of the People, are the Occasion of these Divisions, shall have the publick Honour of ruining the Cause you undertook to support: For the Generality of People, who never reason accurately, will readily conclude, it was ruined by you, if it sink under your Care; tho' you, Sir, should be so complaisant as to say, It fell by the Obstinacy and Perverseness of a People unworthy of any One's Study to please, and by the seditious Practice of some Ministers unworthy the Honour, the Liberty and Privilege of ministering to any Christian Congregation.

But perhaps, Sir, you will tell me, That Ministers need not be afraid of any such dismal Consequences; for, tho' some of the lowest of your Auditors should be lost, you will gain over others to fill up their Places, in a Manner more agreeable to yourselves, and more honourable to
 C your

your Cause in the Eyes of the World. Many Gentlemen now of the Episcopal Communion, and in the *Jacobite* Interest, when they observe the rising Generation of Ministers to be addicted to the Study of Learning and Politeness, and when they find themselves invested by a Deed of the Church with the Right of chusing Ministers to Vacancies, will, by these Means, not only be brought to a better Liking of us than formerly, but also to join with us in Communion, when they find our Churches filled with Ministers of their own chusing, and with Ministers agreeable to their own Taste and Relish. I shall perhaps surprize you, when I say, I would not be much charmed with such a Proposal, were it ever so practicable, were the Prospect of Success ever so fair; which yet I can by no Means allow to be the Case: The Gentlemen spoke of are supposed to withdraw from our Communion, not upon Principles of Conscience, or an Apprehension of our being *Schismatics*, &c. nor to consult Conscience in the Choice of religious Assemblies, but to act from very different Motives; And, are the People to be neglected and dispirited, with a View to bring over these Gentlemen, or to make other Profelytes of their Rank, Character and Taste? Some of them may, perhaps, now and then make an occasional Visit to our Assemblies for their Amusement, as they frequent the Theatre; but surely they can never be depended upon as the Support of an Interest: And, whatever may be your Opinion, I cannot help thinking, an honest Mechanick, Farmer or Day-labourer, who attends the Church from a religious Principle, is a much more honourable and generous Creature, and deserves much greater Respect from a Christian Minister, than such Gentlemen with all their real or supposed Learning and Politeness: In the Sight of God, I am sure, you will allow that it is so.

I have now considered the Matter in a political View, and endeavoured to show, merely from prudential Considerations, that the present Way of planting vacant Congregations tends directly to the Prejudice, to the Ruin of our Interest, as Presbyterians. And I might here suggest, That the Frame of the Assembly's Act, the Foundation of such a Procedure, is no less unpolitical with respect to the present Government of the State, and most destructive of our Interest, as the Members of Civil Society, under the Protection of our most gracious Sovereign: For, not to repeat

repeat what hath been said, I mean its lodging in a great Measure the Power of electing Ministers in the Hands of his avowed Enemies ; not to mention this, I say, all of us are certain, that the Populace imagining some of its Reverend Compilers to be under the Management of certain great Men now at the Helm of Affairs, hence they conclude, that the Act hath not been framed without their Advice and Direction, which naturally inspires them with Hatred and Resentment against such; and this growing into Rage and Fury, vows Revenge upon one Person after another, until it even reach the Throne itself : However unjust the Progression, altho' not to be formed without a wretched Chain of Reasoning, yet some how or other it hath entered the vulgar Mind : And because, methinks, no true Friend to our happy Establishment would willingly do what might lay a Foundation for increasing our present Disorders, I shall therefore gladly suppose, that this Consequence did not appear to our Reverend Projectors; and now, that it does, allow me to hope they will use their united Endeavours to quench the Flame which they have kindled without Design ; especially considering, that Religion furnishes us with many Considerations to the present Purpose, of much greater Importance than any which can arise from merely political Views of Things.

Most certainly, there is a Dignity and a Glory in every rational Creature and immortal Soul, which must recommend it to the Wise and the Good, tho' it may be destitute of the Ornaments of Education, or splendid Circumstances in Life. Let us think of it in its lowest Ebb of Fortune, or even of Character, as still the Offspring and Image of the Great Father of Spirits, and as the Purchase of redeeming Love ; let us consider what an Influence its Temper and Conduct may have, at least on the Happiness of some little Circle of human Creatures, with whom Providence has linked it in Kindred, in Friendship, or in Interest ; and especially, let us consider what it may become in the gradual Brightnings and Improvements of the eternal State ; let us, Sir, seriously dwell on such Reflections as these, too obvious to be overlooked, yet too important to be forgot, and we shall find a thousand Arguments concurring to inspire Ministers of the Gospel with such a Regard for the People, as will, in my Apprehension of Things, necessarily lead them to say, That there cannot be a more notorious Lording it over them, or a more flagrant

grant Exercising the Lordship and Dominion of the *Gentiles*, than by spiritual Penalties (temporal ones not being in your Power) to flake them down, whether willing or unwilling, under the Rule and Government of a particular Minister; obliging them, *poor helpless People*, to acquiesce in him, and commit themselves to his Power, whether they apprehend him fit for the Trust not. And, can you, Sir, think, that this is nowise contrary to the Mind of Christ? I hope you will not say so; and yet, unreasonable, unchristian as it is, it is of late become too customary in the Church, the main Body of some Christian Congregations being cut off from Church-Privileges, unless they'll receive them from the Hands of one that is obtruded upon them, or procure from him a Liberty to repair to others for them. If it be an Advantage for Children to be baptized; and if, by the Law of Christ, they are intitled to this Privilege; Is it just, or is it Christian, to make their Enjoyment of it to depend upon the Judgment of the Parent's agreeing with the Judgment of a particular Minister, or upon their Compliance or Non-compliance with mere Church Canons and Appointments? Again, whose is the Table at the holy Communion? Is it the Lord's Table, or is it the Table of a Party of Men? If it be the Lord's, then certainly it ought to be free to his Guests, *i. e.* to such as make a visible and credible Profession of Christianity; and such ought not to be debar'd for their Non-compliance with the Ordinances and Appointments of Men. You will say, These Things are necessary for maintaining good Order and Government. Must then the most sacred Institutions of Christ be prostitute to the base and ignoble Service of being employed as Tools to support the Power and Authority of Churchmen? Shameful Prostitution! *O my Soul, enter not thou into their Secrets.*

To complete my Design, I shall make the two following Remarks upon the *Narrative*, &c. which seem to me sufficient to give a View of the State of the whole Matter contained in it, sufficient to set its Reasonings in a clear Light.

First, then, I would observe, That it is the plain Design of the *Narrative-writers* to perswade Mankind, that the Synod, and after them the Assembly, ordain'd Mr. *Erskine* to be rebuked only for the offensive Expressions vented in his Sermon, tending to disturb the Peace and the good Order

Order of this Church * ; not for any Heterodoxy in Doctrine, but for railing against his Brethren, and the indecent Manner of expressing his Sentiments concerning the Acts of Assembly, particularly the Act 1732; never in the least intending to debar him or any other Minister from testifying and bearing Witness against the said Act on all proper Occasions.

Was this the Case, I believe few would attempt to challenge the Proceedings of your Church, and I should be the last Man who would call the Equity and Reasonableness of their Conduct in question. I know no wise Man would adhere tenaciously to Modes of speaking, which might occasion Disturbance in the Society of which he is a Member, when allowed to express the Truth in other Terms equally significant : And who would not find Fault with the Minister who protests against his Mother-church, while she distinguishes between the Matter and Manner of his Sermon, condemning only the latter? “ No Body (*to use the Words of the Narrative*) will refuse, that the uttering of indecent Expressions by a Minister anywhere, much more in the Pulpit, and still more on such a publick Occasion, not only against Ministers, but the Judicatories of this Church, even the highest, intending to disturb the good Order and Peace thereof, is contrary to the Word of God.”

I suppose, Sir, this will be generally allowed ; but it happens a little unlucky for the Honour of the Church, and the Credit of the *Narrative-writers*, that the Representation they give of the Matter is by no Means fair and just, and that Mr. *Erskine* was actually condemned, not only for indecent Expressions, but on Account of the Matter which these contained. As I reside not within the Bounds of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling*, nor had Access to know the Reasonings of the Members of it ; and my Circumstances, as a private Man, bearing no Part of any Judicatory whatsoever, obliged me to mind my own Affairs more than what past in a Synod so remote : But the Assembly's own Act in Relation to Mr. *Erskine*, of the Date *May 15. 1733*, puts what I have just now advanced beyond all Question. I need not inform you, Sir, that, in the Preamble to the Assembly's Sentence, appointing him to be rebuked, it is express in direct Words, “ That the Synod found
Ground

* See p. 14, 18, 19, &c.

" Ground to censure him on Account of several indecent
 " Expressions, and *impugning* several Acts of Assembly
 " and PROCEEDINGS of the Church-judicato-
 " ries,——which the Assembly having considered, they
 " approve the Synod's Sentence, and appointed him to be
 " rebuked." Can Words, Sir, make it plainer, than
 that the Assembly supposed the Synod to have challenged
 Mr. *Erskine*, not only on Account of indecent Expressions,
 but for maintaining certain Things to be Truths which
 were opposite to Acts of Assembly, and for condemning
 the Procedure of this Church? Or, can there be any
 Doubt, that they who declare their Approbation of the
 Synod's Proceedings, and confirm their Sentence, by infli-
 cting the same Censure, did it on the same Grounds?
 Sure, Sir, you will never suppose, that, by the Account gi-
 ven in this Act of Assembly of the Synod's Conduct, no-
 thing more is meant by these Phrases [" They appointed
 " him to be rebuked for several indecent Expressions ut-
 " tered by him in a Sermon, &c. and *impugning* several
 " Acts of the Assembly ;"] than this, They rebuked him
 only for the indecent Manner in which he attacked certain
 Acts of Assembly ; which he might have done with Im-
 punity, if his Words had been well chosen ; and shown,
 if he could, the Injustice of them in the strongest Terms,
 provided they were decent. You can never suppose this,
 because these Phrases contain two distinct Branches of
 the Charge ; nor can you imagine, that, while the Assem-
 bly approves the Synod's Procedure, and appoints Mr.
Erskine to be rebuked, without the least Insinuation of their
 Dissatisfaction with the Synod's Conduct, that their Design
 was to approve of the Synod, only in so far as they censur-
 ed him for the indecent Manner of Expression, but not
 to justify their finding Fault with the Things themselves.

Certainly, Sir, you will never admit either of these Ex-
 planations, so contrary to the plain and natural Meaning of
 the Words ; and yet, unless one or other be true, both
 Synod and Assembly condemn Mr. *Erskine* for the Matter
 of his Sermon, as well as the Manner in which it is ex-
 pressed. What then shall the World think of the *fair*
State of the Proceedings of the Judicatories given us in
 the *Narrative*, where we are told, That certain Modes of
 speaking were all the Quarrel ; That the Ground of the
 Synod's Quarrel was, " That Mr. *Erskine* had emitted inde-
 cent

“ cent Expressions in his Sermons ; That their Censure was
 “ not inflicted for any Heterodoxy in Doctrine, but for
 “ railing and declaiming against the Church and his Bre-
 “ thren ; and that the General Assembly, who took up
 “ their Cause, appointed him to be rebuked for the offen-
 “ five Expressions vented in his Sermon, tending to di-
 “ sturb the Peace and good Order of this Church.”

It is Pity, Sir, that you or some other of the *Narrative-
 Writers* had not been present in the Synod ere they pass
 their Sentence ; then could you have informed them for
 what Reason they were going to censure Mr. *Erskine*, and
 advised them to distinguish betwixt the Matter of his Ser-
 mon, and the Manner of expressing himself ; which would
 have happily prevented the Dissent of the Brethren, who
 demanded this Distinction to be made, and by no Means
 pretended to vindicate his particular Modes of Expressi-
 on : But the Synod, being destitute of such wise Counsel,
 refused the Demand, and stated the Vote in general, *Cen-
 surable or not* ? Which could not but insinuate, at least
 into weak Minds, that something more than mere Words
 were worthy to be condemned in his Sermon. And, is it
 not greater Pity, that, when the Assembly so far misunder-
 stood the Synod, as to dream that they had found Ground
 to censure him, on Account of several indecent Expres-
 sions, and *impugning* several Acts of Assembly ; and when
 they approved of the same, and appoint him, in Conse-
 quence of it, to be rebuked at their own Bar ; Is it not
 Pity, that you did not then inform the Assembly, that
 the Ground of the Synod's Sentence was not his *impugning*
 Acts of Assembly, but the uttering of indecent Expres-
 sions ; and that when the Assembly itself administred a Re-
 buke, it was only upon this Account ? Of how great Use
 had such an Explication been ? It had at once prevented
 all the unhappy Consequences that have since taken Place
 in Relation to this Affair, while it would have removed
 the very Ground upon which Mr. *Erskine's* Protest was
 built ; for he having the Misfortune with others to be-
 lieve, that when he was censured for indecent Expressions,
 and *impugning* Acts of Assembly, that he was actually con-
 demned for the *one* as well as the other, protests purely on
 Account of the latter, as follows ;

“ Altho' I have a great and dutiful Regard to the Ju-
 “ dicatories of this Church, to whom I own my Subjecti-
 “ on

“ on in the Lord; yet in Respect the Assembly have
 “ found me censurable, and have tendered a Rebuke and
 “ Admonition to me, for Things I conceive agreeable to,
 “ and founded upon, the Word of God, and our ap-
 “ proven Standards; I find myself obliged to protest a-
 “ gainst the foresaid Censure, as importing that I have
 “ in my Doctrine, at the Opening of the Synod of *Perth*;
 “ *October* last, departed from the Word of God and the
 “ foresaid Standards; and that I shall be at Liberty to
 “ preach the same Truths of God, and to testify against
 “ the same, or like Defections of this Church, upon all
 “ proper Occasions. And I do hereby adhere unto the
 “ Testimony I have formerly emitted against the Act of
 “ Assembly 1732, whether in the Protest entred against it
 “ in open Assembly, or yet in my Synodical Sermon; cra-
 “ ving this my Protest and Declaration be insert in the
 “ Records of the Assembly, and that I be allowed Extracts
 “ thereof.”

In all this Protest there is not one Word importing his
 Dissatisfaction with the Assembly, for finding Fault with
 his Method of Speaking; On the contrary, one with half
 an Eye may see, that it plainly proceeded from an Appre-
 hension, that the Assembly, by their Rebuke, designed to
 deter Ministers from testifying against Acts of Assembly,
 however unjust.—— Thus says he, “—— In respect
 “ the Assembly have tendered a Rebuke to me *for Things*,”
 (not Words.) Accordingly, what he pleads for is, a Liber-
 ty to preach the Truths of God, to testify against the De-
 fections of the Church; and is so far from a tenacious Ad-
 herence to Forms of Speech, that he never once mentions
 his Synodical Sermon, but as it contains a Testimony against
 the Act of Assembly 1732. Had I not then good Rea-
 son to say, That, if the Assembly designed no other Thing
 but to rebuke him for Modes of Speaking, this was the
 most proper Time to have told him so much, and would
 at once happily have determined the whole Affair? Then
 might you have informed him how much he mistook the
 Assembly's Design, that all Liberty was allowed him to
 testify against such Acts, and that the Sentence proceeded
 only from his unguarded offensive Expressions: But when,
 instead of this, he's ordained to appear before the Commis-
 sion in *August* thereafter, to retract his Protest, and show his
 Sorrow for the same; and, in Case he did not, that Com-
 mission

mission is appointed to suspend him from the Exercise of his Ministry. Is it possible to believe, when this is the Case, that they had no Design to restrain him from venturing such Things as he had asserted in his Sermon, but only to reform the Dress in which they were clothed? Is he called to be sorry for a Protest taken that he may have Liberty to testify against such Acts of Assembly as that in 1732, to retract the same, or suffer a severe Punishment by that very Assembly, who does not think him Blame-worthy on Account of such Testimonies, nor challenges his Conduct in that Respect?

I am afraid, Sir, in this Age, wherein there is such a Decay of Christian Charity, Men will be more apt to believe that the Synod and Assembly censured him for his Doctrine as well as Expression; and that the asserting the latter to be the sole Ground of their Sentence, is the *After-contrivance* of the *Narrative-Writers*, who probably had too great an Hand in framing the Act, and now find themselves at a Loss to vindicate their Conduct. And I persuade myself, no small Number of the last Assembly, who voted on the same Side of the Question, will have the Ingenuity to own, that the *Narrative-Writers* have misrepresented the Assembly's Design, and heartily concur with them; while in the Preface they say, "That the Reflections and Observations of the *Narrative* are the private Reasonings of the few concerned in drawing up the State; and that for these, not the Commission, nor any Judicatories, but they only are answerable."

Allow me, Sir, before I dismiss the Matter in Hand, to ask one Question; If Mr. *Erskine* was condemned only for Words, how comes it about that Masters *Wilson* and *Moncrieff* were laid under the same Censure, who directly own that they cannot justify his Modes of Expression?

This, Sir, you find in the 5th Reason of Dissent. It indeed surprizes you *Narrative-Writers*, how then these Brethren could dissent from the Synod's Sentence, which condemned only Words: And you are willing to solve the Mystery, by supposing that the Dissenters make a Distinction betwixt unjustifiable Modes of Expression, and indecent Expressions deserving Censure. But you might have saved yourselves the Trouble of this important Discovery, had you been pleased to read their whole Reason of Dissent, which I now present you with: "We dissent from" (say they) and protest against the Sentence of the Synod,
" finding

" finding Mr. *Erskine* censurable for some indecent Ex-
 " pressions emitted by him in his Sermon at the Opening
 " of the said Synod, because we saw that the great Thing
 " which stuck with the Synod in this Matter, and deter-
 " mined them to find Mr. *Erskine* censurable, was his ha-
 " ving spoken in his Sermon against the Act of Assembly
 " 1732, anent Planting vacant Congregations: For, tho'
 " we will not pretend to justify every particular Mode of Ex-
 " pression used by Mr. *Erskine* on this Head; Yet to find
 " him censurable for declaring his Mind against that Act
 " upon such an Occasion, appears to us a Precedent of so
 " dangerous a Nature and Tendency, as we judge ourselves
 " bound in Duty to testify against.

Here, Sir, is *no nice* Distinction betwixt unjustifiable Modes
 of Expression, and indecent Expressions deserving Cen-
 sure, *that one can scarce discern the Difference*; but a plain
 Account of the Matter, That, altho' they do not justify his
 Modes of Speaking, yet they dissent from the Synod, be-
 cause they apprehend something more than mere Words,
 that *Things* themselves are censured: And how good Rea-
 son they had to apprehend this to be the Synod's Design,
 judge ye, from what I have already said; particularly, that
 notwithstanding the Motion made by the dissenting Bre-
 thren, That the Synod should distinguish betwixt the Mat-
 ter contained in the several Propositions quarrelled in Mr.
Erskine's Sermon, and the Manner in which they were ex-
 pressed, the Synod refused to grant this reasonable Re-
 quest: And these Brethren cannot but now think they had
 a just View of the Affair, when they find the Assembly go-
 ing along with them, and declaring that the Synod had
 found Ground to censure him for *impugning* several Acts
 of Assembly.

But, to come more close to the present Question, I shall
 allow for once, that the Synod and dissenting Brethren
 were of one Mind, and that the Dissent was of a very ex-
 traordinary Nature, in regard that the Synod condemned
 only what they themselves owned unjustifiable: Yet,
 whence is it, that Two of them are equally punished with
 Mr. *Erskine* by the Assembly, which, according to your
Narrative, condemned him only for Modes of Speech? Fa-
 tal Manner of Expression! The Man who uses it must
 suffer, and they who declare they won't justify it, fell un-
 der the Lash. As you find out a Reason for the dissenting
 Brethrens Conduct, allow me to suggest one for the Assem-
 bly's

bly's Procedure; I mean, That these Men must no more preach the Gospel of Jesus within this Church, because, altho' they did not justify Mr. *Erskine's* Expression, yet they might have done it. Highly reasonable!

The *Narrative* hath given an Argument of a different Nature, and I doubt not but the World will own it to be equally conclusive: Pages 18. and 19. after some Reflections against Masters *Wilson* and *Moncrieff*, for mistaking the Design and Nature of a Dissent, and the little Regard of these Brethren to the Peace and good Order of the Church, notwithstanding of their Mildness to them; it subjoins their Adherence to Mr. *Erskine's* Protest:

We undersubscribing Ministers, Dissenters from the Synod of Perth and Stirling, do hereby adhere to the above Protestation and Declaration (viz. of Mr. Erskine's) containing a Testimony against the Act of Assembly 1732, and asserting our Privilege and Duty to testify publickly against the same, or the like Defections, on all proper Occasions.

" Thus, says the *Narrative*, they carry on their Synodical Dissent to the Height of a Declaration of a War
 " against the Church, without any Call to it; and, without
 " any Necessity, have espoused and adopted the censurable
 " Expressions of Mr. *Erskine's* Sermon, which they themselves had owned they would not justify; and so justly
 " subjected themselves to the Censure of the Church, for
 " supporting Mr. *Erskine* in his Modes of Speaking, which
 " they themselves had in Effect condemned."

Except the *Narrative-Writers* expect to deprive Men of their Judgments by the Vertue of mere Sounds, I cannot conceive how they should imagine, that any Person would believe what is here alledged to be a sufficient Proof of these Brethrens having espoused Mr. *Erskine's* censurable Expressions. They had formerly refused to vindicate them, and dissented from the Synod only, because they imagined his Doctrine was found Fault with: The Assembly approves of the Synod's Sentence; he fancies they rebuke him for Things which he taught agreeable to the Word of God; protests for Liberty to declare, what in Conscience he was perswaded was Truth, without contending in the least, as I have shown, for this or that Manner of Speech: To this Protestation they adhere, and have no Ground to conjecture what was their View of it, while they add, " Containing a Testimony against the Act 1732, and
 " asserting our Privilege and Duty to testify publickly
 " against

“ against the same, or the like Defections, on all proper
 “ Occasions.” What Conduct more consistent with them-
 selves? Can any Thing be more unlike their espousing the
 censurable Expressions of Mr. *Erskine's* Sermon? Nay,
 should we suppose the Assembly to have condemned him
 only for the Frame or Form of his Discourse, and that
 his Protest against them was merely on this Account, the
 contrary of all which hath been made evident; In that
 Case, we might have pitied the Weakness, and lamented
 the mistaken Notions of these Brethren, but could never
 with the least Justice consider them as favouring his inde-
 cent Expressions, while it is evident they had a quite other
 View of the Matter, and adhere to his Protest, because
 they imagined the Design of it to be a Testimony against the
 Act of Assembly 1732. But the *Narrative-Writers* have
 told us the contrary; and that, by their Adherence to his
 Protest, “ They have espoused and adopted his censurable
 “ Expressions:” And perhaps I shall be reckoned too
 bold to call it in Question. Certainly, as one says concern-
 ing the Church of *Rome*, their Inferences must be just and
 true, altho’ they by no Means follow from the Premisses.
 The Argument in the *Narrative* is in short this; “ Mr. *Er-*
 “ *skine* protests for Liberty to assert Truths, without con-
 “ tending for this or that Form of Speech; To this Pro-
 “ test, Masters *Wilson* and *Moncrieff* adhere: Therefore it
 “ appears that they supported him in his indecent Modes
 “ of Speaking; and for this only they were censured; *Gre-*
 “ *dat Judeus apella.*”

With equal Justice our Authors might have argued,
 That, because the Committee appointed by the Commissi-
 on in *November* to converse with the suspended Brethren,
 did not doubt but the Reverend Commission would distin-
 guish betwixt the Matter and the Manner of Mr. *Erskine's*
 Sermon, and declared to those Brethren, that they judged
 nothing more was intended by the Sentence of the Assem-
 bly, but the condemning of the latter; and that, because
 the same Committee made a Proposal, That, if the next Ge-
 neral Assembly shall declare, That it was not meant by the
 Act of the last Assembly to take away the Privilege of
 Ministers to testify against Defections, that the Brethren
 shall retract their Protest: With equal Justice, *I say*, the
Narrative might have hence inferred, That certainly the
 Assembly in 1733 intended no more; for, when Asserti-

ons are all that we have in Place of Argument, it is no Matter from whence the Inference is deduced.

Having mentioned the Committee's Overture, I cannot miss to observe, from the Answer given to it by the four suspended Brethren, That an Opportunity was put into your Hands of pleading, that no further Censure should be inflicted. In that Answer, the Reason why they declare they have no Freedom to go in to the Proposal, runs thus; "Because the obvious Sense and Meaning of the said Act and Sentence (*viz.* the Act censuring Mr. *Erskine*) appears to us to lay a Restraint on Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness in testifying against the Act of Assembly 1732, and the like Defections in this Church, on proper Occasions; and, as this was the Ground of our Protestation, so any Declaration that a subsequent Assembly can make, cannot remove the Ground upon which we protested against that Decision."

Here we see, in the clearest Terms, that their Notion of the Assembly's Act, and their protesting against it, had no Relation to indecent Expressions, or a Desire to retain them; but proceeded merely from an Apprehension, that a Restraint was, by this, laid upon Ministerial Freedom in testifying against Acts of Assembly, however iniquous.

Now, Sir, if the Committee was persuaded, that the Assembly designed no such Restraint, and particularly you *Narrative-Writers*, some of whom, if I am not misinformed, made up Part of the Number; might you not have insisted, that no further Punishment should take Place? It is true, the Assembly's Commands were peremptory and positive, that the Protest must be retracted, and Sorrow expressed, or further Censure inflicted; but it is as certain, that the Assembly's determining the Matter thus, flowed from their apprehending, that the Protest condemned something which they had done, *viz.* (according to the *Narrative*) their finding Fault with indecent Modes of Speech: And, had they viewed the Protest in the same Light in which this Paper now under Consideration places it, certain I am, they would have dismissed the Brethren from their Bar, after explaining more fully the Nature of their Sentence; otherwise you must suppose, that this learned and wise Society, when censuring one of their Members for Misdemeanours, and his happening some how to mistake the Thing for which he was censured, and, in Consequence of this, together with his Brethren, protesting

ing against the Assembly for finding Fault with what they did not condemn, and pleading for Liberty to do what was not denied; You must suppose, I say, that the Assembly did then appoint these Men to retract such a Protest, express their Sorrow, or suffer, without ever shewing their Mistake, which, according to the present Supposition, they knew. Is it not much more for their Honour to believe with me, that they would have pitied the Weaknesses of these Brethren, shewed them their wrong View of the Matter; and thus, by removing the Cause of their Protest, would have superseded all Necessity of retracting it?

This, I persuade myself, will appear to you at first View: Therefore, without further Words, I give you the Sum of the Argument thus; The Assembly, according to the *Narrative*, appointed Mr. *Erskine* to be rebuked merely for certain Modes of speaking: He protests against this Sentence, and pleads for certain Liberties; to which Protest his three Brethren adhere: The Assembly orders them to retract this Protest, because they understood it as condemning what was done, and a pleading for Liberty to use these Expressions which they had found Fault with: These Brethren declare, before the Committee appointed by the Commission, That, when they protested, they had quite different Notions of the Assembly's Design; and, on the Matter, declare, That they did not plead for Words, but *Things*, and a Liberty to testify against Defections on proper Occasions: Therefore, had the Assembly known this to have been the Design of their Protest, they would not have appointed such a Censure in Consequence of it; so far was proved. The Conclusion then is, That, notwithstanding of the Assembly's Sentence, such of the *Narrative-Writers* as were Members of the Committee, or knew what passed there, might have laid the Matter before the Commission, and insisted for assoilzieing these Brethren, at least delaying to proceed to further Censure until next Assembly; —and this the Commission might have readily granted, —for now it appeared, that the very Reason why the Assembly appointed this Method of Procedure, was founded upon a Mistake owing to Mr. *Erskine* and his Adherents indistinct Manner of expressing their Protest.

Pray, Sir, were you so absolutely bound up, as to deny your Judgment, and have an active Hand in making the *Effect* take Place, when the *Cause* had ceased; how easily could

could you have answered for your Conduct at next Assembly, when at their Bar you should have told, We were indeed ordered to proceed against these Brethren in case they did not retract their Protest; but they gave in a Paper, which evidently shewed they had mistaken the Reason why the Assembly appointed them to be rebuked; a Paper, which on the Matter shewed, that, by their Protest, they did not mean to quarrel the Assembly for what they had done? But, to give yet a shorter View of the Matter, and to carry the Argument further; If the Assembly condemned only certain Modes of Expressions, and appointed them to retract their Protest, because contradictory hereto (which, if you please, we shall suppose a just Account of the Nature and Design of this Protest) Why then, this Paper was a direct Retraction of it, for it retracts it in the Sense condemned by the Assembly; so they were obeyed, and the Censure should have ceased. Therefore, with what Justice and Force of Argument might the *Narrative-Writers* have pleaded for a Delay in this Affair? and then should the World have believed them sincere in that Representation they give of the Grounds of the Assembly's Sentence: But when, instead of embracing this Opportunity to end the Matter in a mild and peaceable Manner, Things were pushed by them with the utmost Severity, and the warmest Speeches vented against a Delay even until the Commission in *March*, which by no Means could be pretended as contradictory to the Assembly's Commands; When this is the Case, every impartial Man will be ready to conclude, that all their Talk about indecent Expressions is indeed *mere Modes of Speech*, and Words of Course used by them, while there is nothing of Reality at Bottom: And what only remains for their Vindication, is, to apply next General Assembly for obtaining an Act declaring Ministers at Liberty to argue and express their Sentiments, even from the Pulpit, against such Acts as that framed in the Year 1732.

In the mean Time, I proceed to make one other Observation upon the *Narrative*.

Seeing it now appears, that Mr. *Erskine* was first rebuked, not only for indecent Modes of Speech, but for his testifying against Acts of Assembly, particularly the Act 1732; and that afterwards he and his suffering Brethren were turned out of the Church, because of their Adherence to a Protest taken against that Sentence: Since this is
the

the Case, then has the Church proceeded in the most rigorous Manner, and all the elaborate Reasonings contained in the *Narrative* are by no Means sufficient to vindicate her Conduct to the impartial World.

The Act of Assembly 1732 must be owned by all to be founded upon mere Church-authority; and this the *Narrative* readily grants, when it says, "That the holy Scriptures seem not to determine who shall be the Electors of Ministers:" Therefore the four Brethren stand condemned, and are debarred from exercising the Office of the Ministry within your Church, because they refused to retract a Protest taken against the Assembly's Sentence, appointing Mr. *Erskine* to be rebuked for testifying from the Pulpit against a mere human Law. How weak and feeble this Foundation is to support such a heavy Sentence, has been already shown from the Nature of the Ministerial Office, and the Manner of its Conveyance from Jesus the wise Author of the Constitution, together with the Relation which he stands in to his Church, as her only Lord and Law-giver.

But, since the *Narrative* insists so much upon Church Power and Authority, and even supposes it the more criminal in Mr. *Erskine* to speak against the Act 1732, "because the holy Scriptures seem not to determine who shall be the Electors of Ministers;" On this Account I shall pursue the Argument a little further in the following Manner:

By the *Church*, in the *Narrative*, I suppose, Sir, is not meant that Body of Men who in this Country profess Christianity: It seems necessary to understand it there of such of the Clergy and Lay-elders as meet together in Assemblies, Commissions, &c. When once, then, we shall understand what Power and Authority truly belongs to such associated Bodies of Churchmen, it will be easy to determine on what Side the Truth lies, and whether or not the *Narrative's* Defence of the Church's Proceedings be just and good: And here, so far as I can understand the Subject, either,

First, Such associated Bodies of Churchmen are in the strictest Sense Ministers of Christ's spiritual Kingdom, whose sole Business and Office it is, to publish, to explain and make known his Laws, to preside in his House, and to see his Orders and Constitutions observed in it; but have no legislative Power and Authority to give any new Laws

to his Subjects, which he hath not already commanded:
Or,

Secondly, When thus associated, are vested with Power and Authority to make Laws and Canons relating to religious Worship, Discipline, &c. and therein to command what they judge to be for the Good of Christian Societies; *i. e.* what they judge to be for Order, Decency, Edification, &c.

Their Power, I say, must either come under the former Limitations, or extend thus far; and, if this last be truly the Case, it will, I own, follow, that the Reasoning in the *Narrative* concerning Church-authority, is in general good and conclusive: But if the Clergy be vested by Christ with no such legislative Power and Authority, but the first State of the Case be the true and just one, then the *Narrative's full Vindication of the Church's Proceedings* will not carry in it the very Appearance of Reason; and Mr. *Erskine's* preaching against the Assembly's Act 1732; *i. e.* against their determining with a legislative Authority what is not determined in Scripture, is so far from being criminal, that it must be highly commendable: For, to appear against the Clergy's exercising such a Power as God hath not lodged in them, especially when they are subjecting Christian Societies to visible Hardships, must always be a real Service done to Christianity; and it is much to be wished, that more of this were to be found among Churchmen of all Denominations, and that some were as willing as able to oppose the unjust Attempts of despotick Priests, who are less solicitous about the Salvation of Souls than the Increase of their Power and Incomes, and who, while greedily gaping after Power and Wealth, are upon every Occasion shifting Offices and Employments, till at length they arrive at the highest Preferences and greatest Revenues that, as Churchmen, they can attain to; yet, take their own Word for it, and all this is for the Glory of God, and the Good of the Church. I speak of this with the more Freedom to you, because nothing of such a Temper seems to have taken Place in your humble and generous Mind; and go on to what now only appears necessary for the Support of my Argument, I mean, to lay before you some of these Reasons which have fixed me in the Opinion, that you Churchmen are not vested by Jesus Christ with a legislative Power to enact and appoint what you, from Time to Time, shall judge

judge to be for the Good of Christian Societies, provided always that your Appointments do not run cross to the Laws of Christ.

The Consequences which we named just now, as following upon this Supposition, will not, I imagine, be denied by any : Therefore, I say, the Argument seems only to require, that the Supposition should be shown to be true and real; and what I would offer for that End, take as follows : In the

1st Place, If the Power of the Clergy is not confined to the explaining and enforcing the Laws of Jesus, but extends to a legislative Authority of contriving and framing new Canons; then, Sir, you will please inform the World in what Respects *Jesus Christ* is more the King and Head of his Church than they ; and if in this Case He could be call'd (at least in the Scripture-Sense of the Words) her only King and Lawgiver.

2^{dly}, If I am right, while I suppose the Scriptures to be a perfect and complete Rule in Matters of Religion, and what concerns the Happiness of the Church of God, then both her Doctrine and Discipline must be founded upon it, and proven by it ; and, if so, an End, I think, would soon be put to the legislative Power and Authority of the Clergy, which has been the greatest Source of Mischief to real Religion in all Ages.

3^{dly}, If you Clergy be vested with a legislative Power to enact and appoint whatever you judge to be for Order, Decency, Edification, &c. with this only reserving Clause, Provided that your Appointments be not contrary to the Laws of Christ ; there is nothing I can see to hinder you from going all the Lengths that the *Papists*, these Masters of *holy* Iniquity, have gone : For you yourselves will still be the Judges what is and what is not contrary to the Laws of Jesus, and so what is expedient to be enacted, and what not.

4^{thly}, You seem to be expressly limited and restrained to what I am pleading for, *viz.* to the explaining and enforcing the Laws of Christ : Thus our Saviour, when about to leave this lower World, commissions his Apostles, which you will readily allow was designed to extend to their Successors in the Office of the Ministry, *Go ye therefore, says he, and teach all Nations, — teaching them to observe all Things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

I am aware, some will be apt to imagine, that the Necessity of preserving Peace and Order in the Church is sufficient to answer all which has been said, and a good Reason why the Clergy should have a Power to enact new Laws; but methinks it Pity that the Laws of Jesus are not a sufficient Rule for promoting Peace in his House.

That he fervently wishes the Happiness of his People and Church, will not be doubted by one who knows that he redeemed them with his own Blood; nor will his Wisdom to frame such Rules, as, if observed, would effectually accomplish this valuable End, be called in question by the Man who believes him to be *the Wonderful Counsellor*: For my own Part, I cannot help thinking, that the *God of Order*, and the *God of Peace*, as really desires, that Order be observed, and Peace enjoyed in this Church, as aspiring Churchmen themselves; and that the *infinitely wise Jehovah* is no less capable to discover Means which may have this happy Influence, than ignorant Mortals, Priests not excepted. If, Sir, you are of the contrary Opinion, or rather, if you imagine, that, tho' Jesus *the Prince of Peace* commands all his People to live together in Peace and Unity, tho' he desires nothing more, and has prescribed many excellent Rules for this Purpose; yet others, exceedingly necessary, are omitted, and left by him to the Care of fallible Men, whose Affection to his Church is infinitely less than his own, and who in these Matters are most apt to be mistaken and to split amongst themselves:

If, Sir, you are of this Mind, then it is expected, that you will reconcile this supposed Conduct of the blessed Jesus with the Notions which we must necessarily Frame concerning infinite Wisdom: And I believe you will likewise see it needful to condescend on some Instances by which it appears, that certain Things necessary to the Peace and Order of the Church are by no Means determined by Jesus Christ; or (in other Words) That such *was, is, or may be* the State of the Church, that some other Rule is needful to preserve Peace and Order in it, besides the Divine Command; somewhat more required of the Clergy than the enforcing the Laws of Jesus, and the determining Circumstances of Time and Place which are necessary for that End; something more, I say, than the determining such Circumstances as are necessary to enforce Obedience to the Divine Command: This Power I

all along suppose lodged in the Church, and to belong to them, even when understood in the Sense of which we now speak, as consisting of Clergy and Lay-elders associated together.

But you, Sir, who in the present Case I consider as maintaining their legislative Power, and that in such a Latitude as to warrant the Act 1732, which, in the Sense of the *Narrative* itself, is a *mere human Law*, must carry the Matter a great deal further, and prove, that such an associated Body have a Right, not only to take proper Methods for enforcing Obedience to the Laws of their Lord and Master, but to frame distinct and different Laws of their own, and to sanction them with the severest Penalties.

The Argument therefore, as was observed, requires, that you should shew how it is consistent with the Wisdom of Jesus to endow them with such a Power, while he himself knew better what Laws to frame, and must be supposed to do what tends most to the Advantage of his Church and People, seeing he *loved them unto the Death*; and its Instances of the Necessity of their Power in this extensive Sense to maintain Order and Peace in the Church, which are demanded. Mean while, if you explain and enforce the Laws of Christ, and with Zeal and Diligence exercise the Discipline he hath appointed in it; if you attend to this as your proper Province, you will find Work enough, tho' you divert to no foreign Matters, tho' you make no new Laws, tho' you devise no new Discipline. Happy had it been for the Christian Church, if her Ministers had regularly acted according to this Plan. Every one who knows any Thing of Church-history will acknowledge, that it was the Clergy's claiming and exercising a legislative Power and Authority, which began Antichristian Apostasy, and laid the Foundation of *Babel*, *that great City, which made all Nations drink of the Wine of the Wrath of her Fornication*.

And now, after all, I persuade myself it would be no great Difficulty to prove, that altho' the Clergy had a Power to make new Laws relating to *mere* Order and Decency, that yet Obedience to *all* such Laws is not absolutely requisite in *every* Church-Member, or even Silence, when they in Conscience are convinced somewhat sinful to be contained in them: My Reason for it is this, That I think it might be shown to be more destructive to the Cause

Cause of true Godliness, to thrust out of the Church Men who religiously obey the Laws of Christ, and are well qualified for labouring in the Work of the Gospel, because they cannot go in with every human Device, than to allow them to continue, when not agreeing with the Majority in a Matter of Decency.

The very Reason why you suppose a Power lodged in their Hands of framing the Laws of Order, is, That thereby the Ends of real Religion may be the better obtained (Order, without this, being a solemn Piece of Pageantry, and a vain lifeless Form) certainly then, no Sanction should be annexed, no Punishment inflicted in consequence of the Transgression of a Law relating to Order, when that Sanction, or this Punishment, is prejudicial to the Cause of true Godliness.

It does not seem a sufficient Reply to say, That, if absolute Obedience is not given by all to each of these Laws, then there is no Advantage in making them; for, if framed by the Generality of the Church, they will in general be obeyed: However, I do not assert any Thing positively on this Head, and have mentioned it only with a View to have the Pleasure of your Thoughts concerning it. But I must be allowed to say, That no Supposition of the Clergy's Power to contrive and enact the Laws of Order and Decency and Peace, will warrant the Act of Assembly 1732, and the Sentences inflicted upon Mrs. *Erskine, Wilson, &c.* on Account of their Testimonies against it, seeing it evidently relates to somewhat more than mere Order and Decency, even to the depriving of Men, because not blest with an earthly Inheritance of a Right which seems to belong to them as Men, and which I do not think you will be able to prove Jesus has deprived them of, or even that this natural Right should not take Place, because of the legal Establishments, provided the Patron does not present: And how unfit this Act is for obtaining Peace and Quiet amongst us, let the fatal Disorders and Confusion which have thence arisen bear Witness.

To conclude, I will present you with a Passage from an illustrious Writer, which, by a small Variation I shall adapt to my present Design; a Liberty I have taken in some other Instances in the foregoing Pages.

To be a Friend to Liberty in State-affairs, and an Enemy to it in Church-matters, is inevitably to sacrifice them
both

that, since the Principles of the one are such as by necessity
by Consequence lead to the Principles of the other.

May it therefore, Sir, be the Glory of this Church, to
stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Jesus has made us free ;
to pursue, and have the Resolution to abet such noble,
such generous Principles, as have a direct Tendency to
promote true Religion, the Interest of human Society, the
Liberties of the present Generation and the Ages to come :
A Resolution every Way worthy of the Ministers of the
Gospel, much to be valued and esteemed by all, and parti-
cularly by,

May 1st.
1734.

Sir, Your humble Servant,

X. Y.

ERRATUM.

Page 6, Line 1. for *by*, read *with*.





